

REMARKS

Applicant thanks the Examiner for the courtesy extended during a telephone interview on May 18, 2005. During the interview, the undersigned proposed a further amendment to the independent claims to clarify what is meant by "free of any barrier". Specifically, the proposed amendment recited that the outlet area of the perforated sheet is free of any barrier in contact with the sheet. The Examiner stated that the above limitation was a "new issue", requiring the filing of a Request for Continued Examination. The Examiner also stated that, while the above limitation might distinguish over the Butz patent, the Examiner believed that the Gunn patent (Patent No. 2,409,558) might still be pertinent.

Applicant therefore submits this Amendment, together with an RCE. Applicant requests that the finality of the last action be withdrawn, and that this Amendment be entered.

In the present invention, the perforated sheet is unobstructed, in the sense that there are no dams or weirs, in contact with either surface of the sheet, except at the ends of the sheet. Clearly, the sheet must be supported somehow; in Figure 1 of the present disclosure, the sheet is shown to be supported by a wall of the inlet channel and by a wall of the liquid transfer channel, both channels being located at the ends of the sheet. But as shown in the same figure, the regions immediately above and below the sheet have no barriers or weirs, across the extent of the sheet. Such barriers would interfere with the operation of the present invention, in which substantially all of the liquid from the inlet channel passes from the region below the sheet, through the perforations, and into the region

above the sheet.

All of the independent claims have been amended to recite that there are no barriers, in contact with the sheet, on either side of the sheet, except at the ends of the sheet.

The patent to Butz clearly shows weirs or dams, both above and below the sheet, and throughout the extent of the sheet. Therefore, all of the claims define patentably over Butz.

With regard to the patent to Gunn, Applicant notes that Gunn discloses baffles 5 which are affixed to the lower surface of the sheet. Thus, the lower surface of the sheet of Gunn is not free of barriers in contact with the sheet, as required by the present claims. Gunn is therefore also inconsistent with the present claims.

Neither Butz nor Gunn teaches or suggests a perforated sheet in which both the upper surface and lower surface are free of any barrier in contact with the sheet, except at the ends. Thus, the above references, whether taken alone or in combination, cannot suggest the present claimed invention.

Applicant therefore submits that all of the claims, as amended, are in condition for allowance. Applicant requests reconsideration by the Examiner and early favorable action.